

HOSTING THE KICK-OFF MEETING OF ERASMUS+ INCLUSION PROJECT

The American University of Armenia (AUA) hosted the kick-off meeting of the Erasmus+ INCLUSION project on December 1-2, 2016, devoted to the development and implementation of SD strategies in Armenia and BiH through cross-regional peer-learning. The goal of the INCLUSION project is to address Armenia's and BiH's challenges related to the promotion of SD strategies, as outlined by the respective governments.

On December 1, the initial session began with opening remarks for the successful completion of the project by the Rector of the State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia (SAFAA) Aram Isabekyan, AUA President Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, the representative of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia (RA) Sasoun Melikian, and Erasmus+ National Office representative Ani Torosyan. While attempts to date have been fragmented and effective but on a smaller scale, the project aims to enhance the capacity of HEIs for implementing SD strategies; to



clearly define their distinct roles in this domain and to transfer the knowledge gained through capacity building of identified stakeholders. Thus, within the framework of the current project, the key objectives include capacity building of HEI staff and respective governing bodies, as well as developing master plans and institutional support mechanisms for the design and implementation of SD strategies. Another central objective of the INCLUSION project is to foster access to HEIs of persons from vulnerable/underrepresented groups.

With 14 partners from both public and private HEIs, along with representatives from respective governing bodies, the INCLUSION project will result in: national level guidelines for developing SD strategies, institutional level master plans, allocation of

resources for inclusive teaching, materials for awareness-raising of high school pupils and teachers, and finally, trained staff and high school teachers.

All partners of the project agreed to take on specific tasks for the successful implementation of the project. The institutional partners are: World University Service (WUS), Austria; Karl Franzens University Graz (KFUG), Austria; the University of Roehampton (UoR), United Kingdom (UK); the University College Leuven-Limburg (UCLL), Belgium; the University of Travnik (UNT), BiH; the Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA); Sarajevo Meeting of Cultures (SMOC), BiH; University of Tuzla (UNTZ), BiH; RA Ministry of Education and Science; RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; and others. All partners expressed readiness to play an integral role in the INCLUSION project implementation advocating for the improvement of HEIs in Armenia and across the region and making them more accessible to various disadvantaged groups.



INCLUSION INITIATIVES IN SARAJEVO, BIH

The BiH INCLUSION project partners held a coordination meeting in Sarajevo in January, 2017. On this occasion, representatives from UNTZ, UNT and SMOC came together to discuss a range of tasks and responsibilities planned for completion under WP1, to elaborate in greater detail on fact finding tools and literature reviews, and to outline actions for embracing the moodle platform, which raised additional action points for project implementation. The collection of relevant material and documents as part of the literature review was deemed important for conducting the planned survey research at BiH HEIs, as well as for the qualitative data analysis.

The fact-finding reports for Armenia and BiH were finalized and the consortium forged ahead with ensuing WPs on the development of national and institutional policies, along with capacity building activities.



INFRASTRUCTURE AND A NETWORK TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS: TRAINING AT AUA



In June 2017, AUA hosted a two-day training within the framework of the Erasmus+ INCLUSION project. The training began with welcoming remarks delivered by AUA Provost Dr. Randall Rhodes. In his remarks, the Provost underscored that promoting diversity at AUA is a priority principle. "One of the main areas of interest is that we are trying to include students with various learning issues in order to introduce multiple learning strategies. We are trying to create the infrastructure and a network that will accommodate the needs

of students who have physical as well as learning issues so they can academically succeed at AUA," he stated.

A brief review was presented of the activities carried out in the months since the kick-off meeting of the project in December 2016. These included a

country-specific literature review for Armenia and BiH, as well as a review of student and staff surveys completed earlier in the spring of 2017.

Unison NGO then presented

the findings from the research carried out by Armenian partners, including analysis of the school curriculum and textbooks used in Armenia. The group reported that there existed a limited number of materials and sources in the field and only a very small number of people with disabilities were enrolled in Armenian HEIs. Unison has identified a gender gap among students with disabilities, as well as financial difficulties with making tuition payments, and the lack of disability access to buildings at HEIs.

UoR from the UK presented the results from the student and staff surveys conducted earlier in March at SAFAA and AUA. Based on these findings, project participants recommended offering opportunities for students with disabilities to visit HEIs prior to applying in support of their transition while ensuring that admissions committees are well-informed and receive training on disability issues. Additionally, it was recommended to initiate



having an access officer who would liaise between applicants and students with disabilities and teaching staff to arrange for the necessary support services. Students from AUA and SAFAA in Armenia, and UNTZ and UNT in BiH presented the issues of inclusiveness at their respective institutions as they have discerned. Their presentation touched upon the current state of accessibility to buildings at their universities, pending issues that need to be addressed, and recommendations for further support to underrepresented groups in

Subsequently, the UoR partners presented their practices in supporting people with disabilities in the UK, after which workshop participants held small group discussions and shared their views on various questions. The groups addressed issues related to the steps necessary for ensuring that students are heard and their inputs considered when developing the SD strategies at the university level. The groups also discussed ways of enhancing data collection by HEIs so as to ensure appropriate assessment of the needs of underrepresented

WORKSHOP

13-14 June 2017
AUA, Yerevan,
Armenia



Armenia and BiH. Considerable emphasis was placed on the need to address students with mental and physical disabilities and to clearly define the admission criteria for students from underrepresented groups. The participating students from BiH and Armenia received certificates of participation.

groups. The other topics discussed covered inclusive learning and teaching techniques and ways of improving HEI outreach to potential students from underrepresented groups. The discussions were constructive and resulted in drafting institutional and national guidelines for

use in the implementation of forthcoming activities of the INCLUSION project.

REPORTING OUT ON VISIBILITY

To raise awareness of INCLUSION project activities among the public at large and particularly within the HEI community, a broader diverse audience was identified and an appropriate awareness raising campaign was initiated by the leaders of respective project partners – AUA and UNT.

Moreover, to convey relevant knowledge to specific target groups, including HE faculty members and administrators, respective ministries, high school principals and teachers, a series of conferences and round tables were conducted and topical articles were disseminated. Various channels were used to promote action, including trainings, workshops, guidelines, master plans, and reports. The overarching dissemination channel was the creation of the project website, as commissioned by the project coordinator, which is regularly updated with project information and knowledge-enriched. Parallel to the project website, consortium partners also communicate project information through their respective institution websites.

To ensure the results and achievements are well disseminated and the project outcomes are available to the stakeholders, the following activities have been prepared under WP6 as per project requirements:

- Detailed dissemination plan
- Dissemination and branding

materials Web-site development (inclusionerasmus.org)

- Joint [dissemination strategy](#) for AUA and BiH Mid-Term dissemination report

BENCHMARKING EXERCISES IN BELGIUM

Within the scope of the Erasmus+ project, UCLL conducted a two-day workshop in November 2017. The workshop aimed to share



the art of planning institutional mechanisms for inclusive practice and SD strategies to foster access for disadvantaged groups. The central objectives also included development of inclusive curriculum and inclusive assessment formats, leadership and clear responsibilities, and faculty training/induction courses. Delegations from SAFAA, the RA Ministry of Education and Science, ANSA, Unison NGO, Armenia, as well as delegations from UNTZ, UNT, BiH Federal Ministry of Education and Science, BiH SMOC and EU partners from UoR, UK, UCLL and WUS, Austria, were in attendance.

To build supportive-inclusive environments at each PCU, special focus was placed on benchmarking analysis with emphasis on institutional context, institutional

regulations and guidelines, quality assurance and quality enhancement, facilities, buildings and accommodation, learning and teaching, and supplemental support and advice. Discussions followed on the implications of writing institutional and the national/regional guidelines, as well as exercises on stakeholders and SD strategies. Building upon the strengths and curbing the weaknesses identified during

benchmarking exercises (different options depending on institutional and national context, stakeholder involvement, and other related factors) were particularly underscored.

“Although AUA promotes inclusive practices, there is room for improvement. This event was a turning point for the AUA team to get down to planning specific strategies and action priorities in this direction,” remarked Dr. Irshat Madyarov, associate professor and chair of AUA’s MA in Teaching

English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program.

UK BEST PRACTICES TO EXPLORE AND LEARN: 2-DAY TRAINING AT UOR

On March 19–23, 2018, a team from Armenian partner universities and organizations in the Erasmus+ INCLUSION project participated in a week-long training at UoR, UK, to learn about inclusion in education. The event was led by Bridget Middlemas, Jo Peat, and Clara Rubiano from the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit of UoR.

The participants learned about good practices of inclusive education from their British colleagues and were tasked to create a draft master plan for improving inclusion specific to the strategic goals of their respective institutions.

“Although AUA has a lot to share with other Armenian universities and the public in terms of inclusive practices and access to education, this trip was thought-provoking in many ways. For one thing, consistent implementation of inclusive practices in the UK educational system started in the early 21st century only. They



have achieved a lot within just a few years, and their model is a good example to explore and learn from. Also, I was impressed with the rigorous approach to faculty training and data-driven student support services at the University of Roehampton,” said Dr. Madyarov.

“AUA provides access to higher education to people with disabilities through its facilities, yet the concept of inclusion is much greater than the physical building. Faculty, staff and students need to be much more aware of the varied definitions of disability, be more open and appreciative of diversity in all its forms, and learn how to accommodate the diverse educational needs of our students. In addition to providing targeted support to students with disabilities, we need to implement campus-wide awareness raising events, as well as support inclusive education on the national level,” said Yelena Sardaryan, AUA Counselor.

CONTRIBUTION OF ARMENIAN HEIS TO INCLUSION RESULTS

Since mid 2017, AUA and SAFAA, together with the RA Ministry of Education and Science Inclusion teams, are working on developing high school teacher training methodology. AUA is the leader of WP4 on “Capacity Building Related to the Human Resources and Physical Resources”, which aims at developing methodology and a tool kit, as well as conducting inter-project coaching and workshops with target groups. Furthermore, AUA



ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION AT AUA: HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING METHODOLOGY

On June 13, 2018, AUA organized a round table discussion on “Assistance to Inclusive Education Initiatives in the Republic of Armenia.” The event aimed to support inclusive education activities in Armenia within the framework of Armenia’s comprehensive strategy for 2014-2025. Locally, a large-scale fact-finding/SWOT analysis was conducted among school teachers and administrators, representatives from the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the RA Ministry of Education and Science; Human Rights Defender’s office, National Institute of Education; SAFAA; UNICEF); Yerevan Medical-Psychological-Pedagogical Assessment Center; International Child Development Center (ICDC), as well as teachers and principals

- ◆ Serves as a nexus to fill the implementation gaps by conducting a rigorous needs assessment of the target group through interviews with high school administrators and teachers, INGOs, Human Right Defender’s Office (HRDO) representatives, and experts. It included conducting needs assessment to elaborate appropriate high school methodology by (i) designing questionnaires, tests and other assessment instruments for data collection; and (ii) sharing them with the participants of the round table discussion.
- ◆ Studies successful transition models for children with special needs from high school to HE.





from schools in Yerevan and the regions; Children of Armenia Fund (COAF); World Vision Armenia; Save the Children; Pyunik NGO; Orran NGO; Source Foundation NGO; Bridge of Hope NGO; Unison; Armenian State Pedagogical University (ASPU), and Los Angeles County Commission for Women NGO. The participants of the round table acclaimed that AUA plays a pivotal role in moving the inclusive education agenda forward by serving as the nexus for conversations among these entities, and working with all parties to formulate actionable objectives and expand our scope to look at K-16. The SWOT results were analyzed and discussed with high school teachers and principals in the meeting conducted later in November 2018.

BEYOND COMMITMENT

On November 13, 2018, AUA organized a second round table discussion on its own initiative and beyond its established commitments to the project. The aim was to follow on the previous discussion on meeting existing challenges in the current high school teacher training methodology under “Inclusive education initiatives in Armenia.” Participants presented the primary need-based recommendations that should be addressed in the high school teacher training package. Representatives from the RA Ministry of Education and Science and RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs presented the state’s approach to teacher training for ensuring success of the Inclusion agenda.

A number of challenges were presented to line ministries for consideration in advancing state policy, such as: needs assessment; relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes; applicable resources; training materials; equipment (software/hardware),



transitioning from school to university; bridging programs, etc. Along with those challenges, recommendations were presented, including speaking books; sustained coaching of teachers; alternative teaching methods, creative thinking, and specialized individual learning plans; and a secure environment.

The round table discussions contributed to drafting new HE policies/regulations in support of the Government efforts to meet the goal of achieving inclusive education for all children with special needs throughout K-12 by 2025 by developing the National Guidelines and Teaching resources. Despite the change in Government following the Velvet revolution in April-May 2018, the RA Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) and RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs duly confirmed their readiness for taking project ownership and continuing implementation.

DEVELOPING POLICY ON INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

On October 5, 2018, a round table discussion was held at SAFAA on “Inclusive Teaching and Assessment.” The event aimed at developing inclusive education material for HEIs. During the discussion, the attending SAFAA faculty identified the main issues of inclusive education at HEIs, clustered the students with special needs into respective groups, and discussed ways and approaches to making HE more affordable for everyone.

The participants of the round

table offered several institutional changes, including, redefining responsibilities; organizing trainings for SAFAA faculty and staff; and re-allocating the budget.

SAFAA has developed a foundation document for inclusive HE. In the Academy's Strategic Plan for 2017-2021, the importance of adopting an inclusive approach is highlighted and relevant activities for achieving inclusive HE are described. Besides, SAFAA has proposed the "Policy

to include the preparation of modules and a textbook on special education for high schools, i.e., "Capacity Building Related to The Human Resources and Physical Resources." The international conference on "Road to Inclusion" held on September 28 focused on educational reforms in pedagogical universities within the context of inclusive education, presenting the results from the sustained collaboration between ASPU and the University of Minnesota.



FACULTY AND STAFF TRAINING ON INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGY

Inclusive education involves creating an appropriately adapted educational environment with supportive services, and not simply honoring the right of students with special needs to attend HEIs. One of the necessary conditions for effectively realizing inclusive education is training the teaching staff. On November 29-30, 2018, AUA organized a two-day training



on Inclusive Higher Education" that will contribute to shaping and adopting an inclusive culture at the Academy.

Within the framework of INCLUSION project, working groups continue to expend effort into the development of the National Guideline for Inclusive Education and Guideline for Inclusive Approaches to Teaching and Learning.

EXTENDED PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

AUA's progress on WP4 deliverables, in partnership with UNICEF, ASPU and University of Minnesota, was further expanded

The presence at the UNICEF-led session of the conference of representatives from ministries, NGOs and HEIs acclaims the advancements made nationally over the past two years.





right pedagogical approach to accommodate students with physical and mental disabilities; providing appropriate classroom assessments of students with physical and mental disabilities; distinguishing among learning differences; knowing how to identify students with mental and physical disabilities; and learning about real-life scenarios of how disability impacts

physical and mental disabilities; appropriate pedagogical approaches in dealing with students with physical and mental disabilities; the types of training that would best serve staff to better accommodate students with special needs; how to solve conflicts and problems during exams involving students from underrepresented groups; and other best practices in working with and helping students from underrepresented groups.

for AUA and SAFAA faculty and administrative staff conducted by Bridget Middlemas, Senior Lecturer in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, (Small Enterprise Development Agency) SEDA Programmes Convener, R4NA Tutor, Learning & Teaching Enhancement Unit, UoR, London; UK.

The training included a workshop by Middlemas touching upon inclusive approaches to learning and teaching in HE. AUA and SAFAA faculty discussed issues related to understanding physical and mental conditions that limit students' academic success; providing the

student's academic success and how best to meet such special needs.

One of the important and necessary components of realizing inclusive accommodation is the training of staff for work in an inclusive

environment. In this respect, administrative staff of both universities were trained in how to best support students with



The training helped participants acquire learning strategies, techniques and resources through a range of practical activities in this



domain, mainly for enhancing participation, learning and achievement of all students in sustainable educational environments.

INCLUSION PROJECT IMPACT AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

The project has contributed to Armenian HEIs through the following activities: (i) Building the capacity of HEI academic and administrative staff; (ii) Provision of assistive technologies, (iii) Training of faculty and staff; (iv) Institutional Inclusion Master Plan with action priorities, operational objectives, as well as specific tactical actions, e.g.,



Action Priority 9: Continue developing projects of educational, professional and economic significance for the rural areas of Armenia and for other disadvantaged sectors of the community. The responsible unit at AUA is the Student Affairs division under the Provost's supervision. The operational objective is to support inclusiveness in mainstream education on the national level. Specific tactics under this objective include: SWOT analyses and assessments of inclusive education in K-12; and review of the current ToT program. Below is a snapshot of the AUA Inclusion Master Plan, which sets a new working modality on campus. The full Master Plan can be accessed [here](#).

Ultimately, recognizing the existing barriers and a strong commitment to overcoming them facilitates developing specific proposals for improvement, including policies, strategies, processes and programs that would lead to new practices that foster inclusive education at HEIs.



PROJECT PARTNERS

- State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia
- American University of Armenia
- Unison NGO for Support of People with Special Needs
- University of Travnik
- University of Tuzla
- Sarajevo Meeting of Cultures
- World University Service
- Karl Franzens University Graz
- UC Leuven-Limburg
- University of Roehampton UoR
- Armenian National Students' Assosiation
- RA Ministry of Education and Science
- Federal Ministry of Education and Science in BiH
- Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

